



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

LAND USE AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

GREG COX
First District

DIANNE JACOB
Second District

PAM SLATER-PRICE
Third District

RON ROBERTS
Fourth District

BILL HORN
Fifth District

DATE: October 21, 2009

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: SERVICE FIRST INITIATIVE UPDATE (District: All)

SUMMARY:

Overview

In 2008, the Land Use and Environment Group conducted a functional and organizational analysis of various Land Use and Environment Group departments to better align and coordinate specific programs and to streamline land development processes. The goals of this analysis were to (1) improve customer service; (2) improve the quality, timeliness, and completeness of work, and (3) ensure that land development processes promote safe and livable communities.

In response to the functional and organizational analysis, the Department of Planning and Land Use and Department of Public Works developed the Service First Initiative. The Service First Initiative consists of approximately 70 recommendations designed to improve the land development process and support the associated culture shift within the departments involved in the land development process.

On October 29, 2008, the Service First Initiative was presented to the Board of Supervisors. The Board requested updates at six and twelve month intervals. This is the twelve month update. The proposed action is to accept the update to the Board. This report also introduces (1) a new Board Policy designed to decrease costs for its customers by effectively handling inactive and deficit projects and (2) minor revisions to the San Diego County California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines.

Recommendation(s)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Find the Service First Initiative, and the proposed Board Policy and revised Guidelines exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as specified under Section 15061(b)(3) of the State CEQA Guidelines. (Attachment B)
2. Accept the Service First Initiative Update
3. Approve the Board Policy relating to Inactive Projects. (Attachment D)

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4. Adopt the resolution entitled Resolution of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors establishing time limits for adoption of Negative Declarations and certification of Environmental Impact Reports
5. Approve the revisions to the County of San Diego CEQA Guidelines. (Attachment B)

Fiscal Impact

If approved, these actions will have no fiscal impact.

Business Impact Statement

The mission of the Land Use and Environment Group (LUEG) is to unify the County's efforts in land use, environmental protection and preservation, recreation, and infrastructure development and maintenance. Creating efficiencies within the departments of LUEG will benefit the County customers and the general public by providing shorter processing times, resulting in lower costs to applicants. The Service First Initiative has implemented several measures that have shortened project processing times and improved the quality and completeness of work. These improvements will result in the enhanced ability for LUEG to promote environmental preservation and economic development, in accordance with its mission.

Advisory Board Statement

The Service First Initiative (SFI) Update was presented to the Department of Planning and Land Use Industry Advisory Group on September 3, 2009. The overall response was that industry has seen improvements resulting from SFI. Industry representatives noted improvements in communication between the County and customers, better approaches to finding solutions that work for both the County and customers, and a positive cultural shift by staff. Industry representatives noted that although significant improvements have been attained, the County should continue its efforts under SFI and continue to seek efficiencies.

BACKGROUND:

The Service First Initiative consists of approximately 70 recommendations designed to improve the land development process and promote the associated culture shift within the departments involved in the land development process. The Service First Initiative identifies ten major goals that serve as strategic opportunities for improvement and each include more detailed recommendations for change. The major goals are as follows:

Major Goals

1. Customer service must be the top priority in the new organization;
2. Processing times need to be monitored closely to ensure leadership is available to support responsive high-quality decisions close to the point of contact with the customer;
3. The silos and walls between the departments and divisions involved in the development review permitting system need to be eliminated;

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4. Delivering a high-quality, highly-consistent and highly-coordinated work product requires an ongoing, continual reassessment of regulations and procedures;
5. Emphasis must be placed upon delivering desirable outcomes for the County and its customers and stakeholders;
6. Performance measures need to address a broader set of more qualitative factors;
7. The County and departments need to continually invest and train for new technologies;
8. The Department must make a serious commitment to ongoing training and professional development for its valued employees;
9. Emphasis should be placed on internal communication within the County and external communication with customers and stakeholders; and
10. The County needs to organize around the development review permitting process rather than within its historical silos.

Implementation of the Service First Initiative is on schedule with the implementation plan presented to the Board on October 29, 2008. A detailed report of the individual recommendations is attached (Attachment A).

Critical Elements to Improving Customer Service

As customer outreach and involvement has been a critical element of the Service First Initiative, the following improvements have been recognized by customers in the past six months.

- Customer Service Attitude: Customer Service is now the number one priority for Department of Planning and Land Use (DPLU) and Department of Public Works land development staff. Customers have remarked there is a visible improvement in the approach and philosophy of service within the departments involved in the land development process. Although customers note the land development process can still yield several challenges within the regulatory environment of California, the County of San Diego has demonstrated a willingness and desire to find solutions that work for both the customers and County. In short, our customers have said that we are on the right track and should continue in this direction.
- Enhanced Internal Coordination: The land development process touches several departments within the Land Use and Environment Group (LUEG). Customers have noted the departments involved in the land development process have demonstrated improved internal coordination. This coordination is a result of internal changes such as co-location of staff from LUEG departments, merging functions and staff of LUEG departments, as well as other process changes such as the Development Review Team. The goal of the improved coordination is to present a seamless County experience for the customer rather than requiring customer interaction with multiple County departments.

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- Communication with Customers: Service First Initiative has promoted the importance of communication between the County and customers. There are now periodic meetings and annual trainings with DPLU and Community Planning and Sponsor Groups. The departments involved in the land development process are committed to more proactive communication with customers. If complicated issues arise on a land development project, departments contact the applicant to discuss the matter first and follow up with written communication that outlines the agreed upon approach or solution. Although improved communication will be an area of ongoing emphasis, customers have noted improvements.
- Timeliness and Minimizing Costs: Under the Service First Initiative, DPLU and DPW have conducted several Business Process Reengineering events in recent years to streamline the land development process, decrease processing times and consequently minimize costs to the County and customers. Although project processing times are directly impacted by work of both the applicant and County, several large and complicated projects have demonstrated progress and recently reached decision by the Planning Commission and Board. The successful progression of these projects through the land development process can be largely attributed to changes in attitude resulting from the Service First Initiative.

Additional Tools to Enhance Customer Service

To continue the trend of successfully being able to provide better customer service, reduce processing times, and increase customer savings, the Department is proposing two new tools; 1) a Board Policy to address how to process inactive and deficit projects and 2) revisions to the San Diego County CEQA Guidelines.

- Processing Inactive and Deficit Projects
Inactive and deficit projects, result in a diversion of staff resources, affect internal efficiencies and increase processing time and costs to applicants due to on-going administrative tasks related to case management, changes in State law, and other related requirements/regulations. These on-going administrative tasks result in periodic charges to customers, who many times are not able to proceed with their project due to temporary financial hardships or other similar outside factors.

Currently the Department of Planning and Land Use is processing approximately 750 discretionary projects where more than one-third have a history of case inactivity of twelve months or more. Projects currently experiencing inactivity may be due, in part, to the impacts of the economy over the last year. To provide efficient, timely and cost effective services to its customers, DPLU is recommending a new Board Policy to effectively handle those projects that have a history of inactivity of more than twelve months and deficient financial accounts for periods longer than three months.

The new Board Policy will create a mechanism that allows customers who are processing a discretionary project with a history of inactivity and/or financial hardships, whose applications have not been accepted as complete for purposes of satisfying CEQA, to

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place their project into “idle status” for a maximum of two years. An applicant can request the project be reactivated any time following the placement in idle status for up to 2 years. When a project is placed into this status, there would no longer be an assigned Department project manager and the file(s) would be placed into an idle status library; all project inquiries received while a project is in idle status will be routed to the Department appointed “Project Coordinator.”

- CEQA Guideline Revisions

Revisions to the San Diego County CEQA Guidelines will provide customers with an additional option for how to select a consultant to prepare technical studies and simplify the current application and renewal process for potential and existing listed consultants. The current guidelines require consultants to go through a thorough application process and if listed, attendance at mandatory meetings and trainings are required for the life of their listing. Current guidelines do not have a provision that allows customers to seek the assistance of the DPLU for selection of a qualified consultant to prepare a required technical study. The revisions related to the creation and maintenance of the San Diego County List of Consultants will allow for an open enrollment, a shortened application process, optional meetings and trainings, and will require consultants to submit a new application every four years when the list is being updated. The revisions to the guidelines will also introduce a new option to customers that will allow the County to direct contract with listed consultants, at the request of a customer, for the preparation of a technical study. The direct contract option is a recommendation of the 2008 Citygate Report as well as the Service First Initiative and will only be available if an applicant requests and the County concurs to direct contract based on available resources. These changes will provide more options and new service tools for the customer while continuing to allow access to consultants if the customer chooses to hire a consultant under the traditional method.

Next Steps:

To date, DPLU is on schedule, implementing approximately 90% of the recommendations of the Service First Initiative. These initiatives largely serve as the structural changes to the programs and processes associated with the land development process. While structural changes to processes and programs are critical to facilitate positive change, equally important are the cultural changes that have taken place. The departments involved in the land development process recognize that our customers include project applicants, consultants, community planning and sponsor groups, environmental stakeholders and the building industry. As the San Diego region continues to struggle through challenging economic times, it is important the departments involved in the land development process provide efficient, timely and cost effective services to all of our customers. The departments involved in the land development process play a pivotal role in the local economy and in many industries that employ San Diegans. Our customers have told us that a continued commitment to the Service First Initiative will help provide optimal County services for such customer business.

Environmental Statement


The update, and related items, are found to be exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) . See Attachment D for the environmental documentation.

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Linkage to the County of San Diego Strategic Plan

The County Strategic Plan includes initiatives for the Environment and Safe and Livable Communities. Organizational and functional improvements in the Land Use and Environment Group will facilitate and streamline processes to achieving specific objectives contained in the Environment and Safe and Livable Communities initiatives.

Respectfully submitted,



CHANDRA L. WALLAR
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

- Attachment A – Service First Initiative Report of Recommendations
- Attachment B – Revised San Diego County CEQA Guidelines
- Attachment C – Environmental Documentation
- Attachment D – Processing of Inactive and Deficit Projects Policy
- Attachment E – Resolution

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AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

CONCURRENCE(S)

COUNTY COUNSEL REVIEW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	
Written disclosure per County Charter §1000.1 required?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
GROUP/AGENCY FINANCE DIRECTOR	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Requires Four Votes	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
GROUP/AGENCY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
COUNTY TECHNOLOGY OFFICE	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

Other Concurrence(s): Department of Public Works

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: Department of Planning and Land Use

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AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE: _____

ERIC GIBSON, DIRECTOR

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(continued)

PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:

April 22, 2009 Board of Supervisors – Service First Initiative Update

October 29, 2008 Board of Supervisors – Service First Initiative Presentation

BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:

N/A

BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:

N/A

**ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION
NUMBER(S):**

N/A